

Central Intelligence Agency
Directorate of Intelligence
7 September 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Manpower Situation in North Vietnam

Summary

North Vietnam's manpower resources have proved more than adequate to provide sustained support of the war effort at its present levels and probably are adequate to support an expanded effort. Although Hanoi shows continuing concern about manpower allocations and productivity, the major strains appear to result from a lack of experienced leadership and skilled workers. Unless manpower losses in the South increase sharply, these problems are not expected to become critical.

North Vietnam's population on 1 January 1967 is estimated at 18.3 million. This total includes about 4.2 million males between the ages of 15 and 49, about half of whom are estimated to be physically fit for military service. The estimated civilian labor force of about 9.7 million is overwhelmingly agricultural (7 million) and includes a significant number of underemployed.

The major war-induced drains on North Vietnamese manpower have been those required to sustain the build-up of the armed forces and to cope with the effects of air attacks. The build-up of the military forces has required the drafting of almost all of the 115,000 youth reaching draft age each year and the mobilization of some reservists. Additional thousands have been required to replace combat losses in South Vietnam. An estimated 575,000 to 700,000 individuals, principally civilians, have been diverted to war-related programs such as repair, reconstruction, dispersal and transport programs. Despite these substantial drains we have little evidence that North Vietnam has been hard pressed to meet its manpower requirements. The regime has shied away from adopting the coercive measures that would be expected if the manpower situation were unacceptably tight. We estimate that the regime could divert an additional 350,000 males to war-related civilian

or military work and make further large diversions of manpower from the agricultural labor force. Finally, the enforced shutdown of most modern industry has idled an elite labor force of about 30,000 persons. This group can provide North Vietnam with much of the technical competence and skills that are currently in such short supply.

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Manpower Resources

1. North Vietnam's population at the beginning of 1967 was about 18.3 million people. The population includes approximately 4.2 million males between the ages of 15 and 49 of whom about half are believed to be physically fit for military service. An estimated 115,000 physically fit males will reach the draft age of 17 during 1967. The North Vietnamese military force currently is estimated at about 480,000.

2. The labor force estimated to be available to North Vietnam totals about 9.7 million people of whom 55 percent are female. (See the Table.) The bulk of the labor force -- 7 million people -- is allocated to agriculture and some 60 percent of the agricultural labor force is female. The other major allocations of labor include over 840,000 to the services sector of the economy, 817,000 to industry, 426,000 to transportation and communications, 282,000 to trade and 250,000 to construction.

War-Induced Manpower Requirements

3. The major war-induced manpower requirements in North Vietnam are twofold: (a) those required to support the build-up of Communist military forces in both North and South Vietnam and to replace combat losses; and (b) the substantial diversions of manpower required to counteract the effects of air strikes against North Vietnam.

4. The rapid build-up of North Vietnam's armed forces by about 250,000 during the past two years to its present force level of 480,000 has been accomplished without recourse to full mobilization and the rate of build-up is expected to be much lower in the next few years. The military build-up alone has required about 120,000 persons a year during 1965 and 1966. In addition, during 1966 North Vietnamese combat and infiltration losses probably totaled from 35,000-45,000 persons and have undoubtedly been running much higher in 1967. These manpower requirements have been met, for the most part, by the drafting of almost all the 115,000 physically fit youths estimated to reach draft age annually. The regime has also had to mobilize some reservists and to replace men with women particularly in the underemployed agricultural labor force. The regime has not been forced, however, to alter the current draft age of 17-35 or to resort to coercive measures to obtain military manpower.

5. The principal diversions of manpower have been those associated with war-related programs such as repair, reconstruction, dispersal and transport programs. Air strikes against North Vietnam have required the services of 575,000 to 700,000 individuals, about equally divided between full-time and part-time workers, as shown in the following tabulation:

<u>Task</u>	<u>Thousand Persons</u>	
	<u>Full-Time</u>	<u>Part-Time</u>
LOC repair and reconstruction	72	100 to 200
Transport and dispersal	100 to 120	25
Civil Defense	--	150
Air Defense	83	25 to 30
Coast Defense	20 to 25	--
TOTAL	<u>275 to 300</u>	<u>200 to 405</u>

The air and coast defense activities are handled principally by military personnel, so that the major civilian levy is for LOC repair, transport-dispersal operations and part-time civil defense activities.

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An additional 19,000 North Vietnamese workers are estimated to be in the Laotian Panhandle expanding and repairing the infiltration corridors to South Vietnam.

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Ability to Meet Manpower Requirements

6. Despite the substantial inputs of manpower to military and war-related activities we have little evidence that North Vietnam has been hard pressed to meet these requirements. Hanoi continues to voice concern about manpower allocations and productivity and to stress the increasing importance of female workers. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence that North Vietnam could make substantial increases in its manpower commitment to both military and war-related activities. The major observable strain in the manpower picture is the lack of qualified leaders and skilled workers.

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7. Several factors indicate that North Vietnam is not yet feeling the manpower pinch to any meaningful degree. Foremost, is the existence of the large and underemployed agricultural sector, which accounts for slightly more than two-thirds of the labor force. Although large numbers of agricultural workers have already been taken for military service and part-time work in lines of communication, the number and low unit productivity of agricultural workers means that additional large numbers could be diverted with only a slight impairment of agricultural output. We estimate, for example, that the diversion of 100,000 males from rice production would cause the annual loss of only 50,000 tons of polished rice, or less than two percent of the average annual rice crop. This loss could easily be absorbed by belt tightening, substitution of other foodstuffs, or increased imports. If the diversion of manpower from agriculture were a grave problem, we would expect to see substantially increased imports of labor-saving devices. This has not been observed, thus indicating that the supply of labor has not yet become serious.

8. In addition to the manpower reservoir in agriculture there are various smaller pools of manpower in other occupations which could be drawn upon without adversely affecting production. We have, however, little evidence of diversion of manpower from these sectors. There are estimated to be approximately 120,000 males in trade outside of the state sector; about 175,000 in consumer services such as barbers, garbage collectors, waiters, and publishing personnel; about 40,000 male students above the age of 15 studying in North Vietnam; about 5,000 studying abroad; and about 40,000 males in teaching. Therefore, approximately 380,000 males of working age and capable of some economic activity are available for military-related productive work if labor becomes scarce. The diversion of these workers would undoubtedly result in a decline in services and in the case of students be counter productive in the long-run. This would be justified, however, if a critical manpower shortage arose. So far, except for new tax regulations which went into effect at the beginning of 1966 and were designed to induce private traders and people involved in consumer services to move into more productive activities, there have been no indications that the regime views the manpower situation to be tight enough to warrant the use of draconian measures. In education, for example, the regime has indicated a willingness to increase the number of students as evident from the signing in 1967 of six new cultural agreements calling for the training of students in other Communist countries.

9. North Vietnam's major manpower problem appears to be a lack of experienced leadership and skilled workers. These talents are scarce and are subject to the competing demands of both military and war-related programs. The lack of skilled cadre is a limiting factor in North Vietnam's ability to train and infiltrate troops for service in South Vietnam. It is probably less of a restraint to North Vietnam's capability to counteract the effects of air attack. After more than 30 months of bombing the North Vietnamese are much more experienced at countermeasures, and as Long as morale remains good and imports of necessary equipment continue, North Vietnam should not be faced with a critical shortage of skilled or unskilled labor unless losses in the South increase sharply.

10. The recent intensification of the bombings apparently has not compounded North Vietnam's manpower problems and, at least in the case of skilled labor, may have eased them. The cessation of much of North Vietnam's modern industrial output has affected about 30,000 workers. The labor force disrupted at the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel Complex, the Haiphong Cement Plant, and the Nam Dinh Textile Mill, the most heavily bombed industrial installations, accounts for about 60 percent of the total. However, skilled and semi-skilled workers at chemical, paper, pharmaceutical, and fertilizer plants have also been affected. Although modern industrial output has suffered as a result of the bombings it is most likely that the displaced labor force has been transferred to other productive tasks. The affected workers are the elite of the North Vietnamese labor force in technical competence, general industrial know-how and industrial discipline. They undoubtedly have played a significant role in the dispersal of industrial facilities to outlying regions, the repair of damaged facilities, and as managerial cadres for general bomb damage repair work.

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OD/OER: (7 Sept 67)

TABLE

ESTIMATED CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE OF NORTH VIETNAM
(Ages 15 through 64)
1 January 1967

	(in thousands)	Total	Male	Female
TOTAL	9,700	4,326	5,374	
Production and Distribution	8,859	3,922	4,937	
Agriculture	7,000	2,800	4,200	
Industry	817	491	326	
Construction	250	150	100	
Transport and Communications	436	277	149	
Trade	262	164	118	
Other	84	40	44	
Services	841	404	437	
Administration	76	57	19	
Banking	8	6	2	
Consumer Services	411	173	238	
Culture, Education and Science	191	76	115	
Medical and Social Service	85	46	39	
Other	70	46	24	

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